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The Political and Economic Implications of Private Prisons

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Key Findings

Privatization in America is a debate that is typically argued along partisan lines between Democrats and Republicans. However, both parties have used the 'tough on crimes' motto to increase incarceration rates, build more prisons, and marginalize racial and ethnic minorities. Economically, private prisons have become an extremely profitable industry. Facilitated by zero tolerance and mandatory sentencing requirements, minor and non-violent offenders are incarcerated for considerably longer times relative to their crimes. While profitability is not a crime, a level of concern should be garnered because an overwhelming proportion of inmates are racial and ethnic minorities. The Pew Center estimates 1 in



19 Black men ages of 18-19 are incarcerated in prisons across this country. A new dialogue is needed to address crime and punishment, particularly as political and economic rhetoric have made invisible the institutional barriers that perpetuate the cradle

-to-prison pipeline in urban communities. Ultimately, those who are targeted may be from different walks of life than those who design and benefit from such policies, punishment as a commodity is detrimental to us all.

Research Brief
 Volume 1, Issue 3
 October 2011

Based on the following publication:

Blessett, B. (2012). Prisons for Profit: The Political and Economic Implications of Private Prisons. In Byron E. Price and John C. Morris (Eds.), *Prison Privatization: The Many Facets of a Controversial Industry*. Santa Barbara: Praeger/Greenwood Publishers.

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Recommendations for Practice

1. Remain cognizant of the institutional practices that disaffect whole communities and entire racial/ethnic groups. Too often, we 'blame the victim' without consideration of the inherent institutional biases that promote discriminatory practices.

2. Follow the money: the political and economic ties to the proliferation of prisons have successfully muted alternative forms of treatment and rehabilitation.

3. Do not be constrained by mainstream solutions, but think about ways to positively engage communities to prevent incarceration as the only option.

